

Book Review

SHOREBIRDS IN ACTION

AN INTRODUCTION TO WADERS AND THEIR BEHAVIOUR

RICHARD CHANDLER



Shorebirds in Action: An introduction to Waders and their Behaviour

Richard Chandler 2017. Whittles Publishing, Scotland, UK. Paperback, coloured photographs, 249 pp. ISBN 978-184995-355-9. RRP \$US 27.95

As trainee and established behavioural ecologists with a strong passion for shorebirds, we could not resist reviewing this book. The book's purpose is stated explicitly, it is an introduction to shorebirds and their behaviours. The book presents an introduction to shorebirds (the first 66 pages), followed by an interesting, yet eclectic, series of accounts concerning aspects of life history and morphology: plumage and moults (24 pages), food and foraging (53), plumage maintenance (27), breeding and territorial behaviour (34), migration (22) and non-breeding, anti-predator behaviour (11). In our view, this structure emphasises certain aspects of behaviour and rather neglects others which are equally meritorious of inclusion or prominence. Our suspicion is that the structure was developed to contextualise the impressive array of images. Pages are generally dominated by images rather than text. The often large, full-colour, sharp and energetic images are the highlight of the book, and are likely to effectively engage with the intended audience, which is evidently assumed to be largely unfamiliar with this fascinating group of birds. For us, the strength of this publication lies in these abundant pictures of shorebirds engaged in amazing activities.

There has been a clear effort to make the book global in nature, encompassing as many taxa as possible and, happily, including many resident species which are often neglected. Images of shorebirds from all over the world, from poles to deserts, are exquisitely presented. Despite this, it remains rather northern hemisphere-centric in language, relative representation of taxa and even in literature cited. Difficulties in delivering relevancy in the northern hemisphere are also evident, and

include using both the term 'waders' and 'shorebirds' in the title, which could conceivably create confusion in some areas (this was a no-win situation for the author!). However, the odd picture of non-shorebirds (e.g. egrets) without explicit clarification in the relevant caption could create unnecessary confusion ('waders' is used to refer to herons and egrets in America). Many who handle this book will peruse the images and their captions, without reading the text in detail.

Scientific literature is used throughout the text (there are no in-text citations, but each chapter has a reference list), and by-and-large the text is accurate and informative. The literature used is just a small snapshot of the extensive literature available and, whilst it gives a good grounding, many interesting aspects are not covered or are not afforded sufficient attention. For example, only one sentence alludes to thermoregulatory behaviour, such as "bill-backrest" or "standing-on-one-leg" behaviour. These classic shorebird behaviours receive too little attention, despite recent work showing that they are thermoregulatory in function, and that their use among shorebirds depends on ambient temperature and bill length. This is even more surprising, given that some images of these behaviours are presented in the book (e.g. pages 8, 56, 210, 220, 221 and 235) and that some text deals with other aspects of physiology. Indeed, the section dealing with physiology focusses almost entirely on anatomical adaptations.

It is notoriously difficult to unambiguously assign function to observed behaviours, and many behaviours may have multiple functions. So, a few captions overstate the certainty with which functions of specific behaviours can be asserted. For example, wing-lifting (page 155), which is said to align flight feathers, could also be a pre-flight behaviour which serves both to prepare for flight and perhaps also to signal the intention to fly to nearby conspecifics.

Overall, this book delivers on its promise of presenting a collection of wonderful images, and this constitutes its strength and renders it a useful addition to one's personal library. For novices or those with a latent interest in shorebirds, this book may be the stimulus to become more active, committed 'shorebirders'. As shorebirds decline globally, books such as this could play an important role in instilling the fascination in these birds which could underpin conservation action and research.

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